



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Purpose and Priorities of the OSCE

As delivered by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker
at the opening session of the High Level Consultations, Vienna
September 12, 2005

Mr. Chairman. It is an honor for me to be able to utilize this opportunity to share the U.S. vision of OSCE's role in the Euro-Atlantic area and to consult with colleagues on the way forward.

In the period since September 11, 2001, we have witnessed acts of terrorist violence that underscore the importance of OSCE's broad concept of security encompassing political, human, and economic issues, as well traditional defense and security issues. This organization's greatest strength is its ability to spearhead work we can do together to build security on a foundation of democratic, tolerant societies, and market economies.

It is our absolute conviction that security and prosperity, and an enhanced capacity to deal effectively with new threats and challenges, are best fostered by societies where political and economic freedom thrive; where all views can be freely and openly expressed; and where the accepted principle underlying political activity is that no one, no group, no political party or movement, has a monopoly on truth or virtue, and where all can openly compete under the same rules and conditions. These conditions, enshrined in many farsighted OSCE documents, are also the fundamental concepts underlying President Bush's vision of advancing freedom in the world: promoting democracy and expanding personal freedom is good for our citizens; good for our countries; good for all those in the world who want to have the strongest possible foundation to respond to citizens' needs; good for overcoming intolerance and discrimination; and good for advancing peace and stability. Democracies make good neighbors.

Many regional organizations are engaged in the work of building this new world. There is enough work for all, without competition or inefficient overlaps. The United States strongly supports efforts to improve communication and coordination between organizations, including between governmental organizations and NGO's, and to find the best way to use our strengths.

OSCE has unique assets in this effort to spread the values of freedom and democracy, confront new transnational challenges to peace and human dignity, and thereby build security for all. OSCE's large membership and geographic scope, and its extremely broad mandate and range of competencies, has allowed this organization already to chart new territory, through field missions which day-to-day confront the challenges posed by terrorism, trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs, migration, and inter-group conflict. Concerning OSCE's vital security dimension, the United States recognizes and appreciates the good work OSCE has already done on these issues, and is committed to continuing to support these efforts.

My government applauds the way OSCE has worked over the years to promote the principles and values enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, whose 30th anniversary we have just celebrated. Its record over the past 15 years in fostering post-conflict stabilization and reconciliation; in striving to resolve peacefully the region's still frozen conflicts; in assisting the development of domestic democratic institutions and procedures; in promoting democratic elections; and in the development of a vibrant civil society, is unmatched. Let there be any doubts, my government strongly supports the OSCE, especially its role in advancing the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and we applaud and will play our full part in efforts to strengthen this institution based on the good work done in the Eminent Persons Panel Report.

OSCE has been able quickly to adapt to deal with new - or newly apparent - challenges and needs, such as the problem of trafficking in human beings, the threat of terrorism, the need for police training and reform. There can be no doubt that a broad range of so-called "soft security" issues are interrelated, and that they also are closely connected to many more traditional areas of OSCE work. This organization's political military dimension has tackled hard issues with practical steps to help eliminate stockpiles of munitions and small arms and light weapons; to improve effective civilian oversight of militaries; and controlling borders. But nowhere is this organization's strength more apparent than in its stunning ability to put together effective election monitoring teams on short notice, with results that are welcomed and endorsed worldwide. The evolution of OSCE's work in this area has been a success story for this organization and for our governments.

OSCE can do this because it has remained flexible and relatively un-bureaucratic, and the United States strongly supports maintaining such a structure. There are too many organizations - for all their other virtues - that can only slowly, ponderously attempt to change or to deal with circumstances not clearly envisaged at the time of their creation. OSCE is different, and this we need to preserve.

We recognize that as times change, organizations must adapt to new circumstances. OSCE is no exception. There are indeed areas where OSCE can more effectively implement its goals, principles and substantive tasks by adjusting its structures and practices. The Eminent Persons Panel Report, and ideas offered by other delegations and organizations, present a number of useful proposals for change that we are ready to explore further and that will be part of our discussions here today and tomorrow. Let me mention a few:

To strengthen the Human Dimension:

- Increasing the capacities and maintaining the independence of the institutions (ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the HCNM).
- Giving the ODIHR Tolerance Program a larger budget and resources.

To make our field Missions more effective:

- Revising local staff salaries so that all field missions are as effective as possible.
- Pursuing legal privileges and immunities for OSCE staff, without the intractable burden of negotiating a new legal status for the OSCE itself.

To give OSCE's Election Monitoring efforts a longer-term perspective:

- More post-election follow-up by ODIHR and participating States.

To help the OSCE as an organization operate more effectively:

- Systematically assessing the OSCE's role and comparative advantages at the Ministerial Council. We believe this could be operationalized if the incoming OSCE Chairman shared with foreign minister colleagues in advance of the OSCE ministerial the incoming Chair's priorities for the coming year. This could stimulate concrete, productive discussion of next year's priorities at the Ministerial Council.
- Identifying states blocking consensus to enhance transparency.
- Measures by the new Secretary General to improve communication between Secretariat units with each other and with the OSCE's institutions.

Let me also note some other recommendations that we believe would not enhance the OSCE's effectiveness:

- A convention or charter establishing the OSCE as an international organization with legal personality. We believe this would misdirect our energies and political capital away from the OSCE's substantive work.
- Restructuring the role of the three Personal Representatives on tolerance and non-discrimination. We believe that failure to reappoint the three personal representatives for 2006 would undermine OSCE effectiveness in this critical area just as their work is getting started.
- Measures that would weaken the flexibility or political leadership of the Chairman-in-Office.

But I want to be clear: it is the firm position of the United States that OSCE, as it is now structured, does excellent work. Reform can strengthen what OSCE does best, but the organization does not need major surgery. The litmus test by which we will consider each proposal for change will be whether it improves OSCE's ability to carry out its substantive goals and tasks, not whether it makes the organizational chart neater. Change must be justified by the substantive results it produces and not by the boxes it rearranges.

Mr. Chairman, we enter this discussion, and those that will take place through the fall, committed to seriously exploring with other delegations practical ways we can improve the work of an already excellent, highly valued, organization. We fully recognize that there are differing views on many of the issues facing us. We will engage with colleagues with good will and a sincere intent to reach practical, workable solutions. We are confident that other delegations will approach these admittedly difficult issues with a similar approach. With that confidence, we are convinced that success - success for the OSCE, for our countries, and for the needs of our common region - are fully achievable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.